

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 IO-14 OMB-01 SAM-01 SAB-01 ACDA-19 DRC-01

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FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 279

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USUN NEW YORK 023

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: MOPS, SY

SUBJECT: UN OBSERVERS IN SYRIAN CUSTODY

REF: JERUSALEM 483 (NOTAL)

1. ON MORNING APRIL 2 ITALIAN AMBASSADOR BUCCI AND I VISITED ITALIAN HOSPITAL IN DAMASCUS WHERE UN OBSERVERS U.S. MARINE CAPTAIN J.J. HOLLY AND IRISH ARMY CAPTAIN J.A. MORTELL ARE BEING TREATED. BOTH MEN ARE IN GOOD CONDITION. THEIR FEET, HOWEVER, ARE BADLY LACERATED BECAUSE FOLLOWING THEIR CAPTURE AT ABOUT 3:00 A.M. BY ONE RPT ONE SAUDI COMMANDO, THEY WERE OBLIGED TO WALK AND RUN BAREFOOTED FOR ABOUT SIX HOURS BACK TO THE SAUDI HEADQUARTERS ON THE SYRIAN SIDE OF THE LINES. AT TIME OF CAPTURE MEN WERE ASLEEP AND WERE TAKEN IN THEIR SKIVIES. THE MEN ARE BEING WELL TAKEN CARE OF AND THEIR SPIRITS ARE HIGH ALTHOUGH IT IS OBVIOUS THEY ARE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SHAKEN, PARTICULARLY THE IRISHMAN, AT HOW CLOSE

THEY CAME TO GETTING KILLED BY EITHER THE HYPER-
NERVOUS, MUD-CAKED, CAMOUFLAGED COMMANDO
OR BY SNIPERS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE LINES WHO HAD
THEM AS HIGHLY VISIBLE, MOVING TARGETS DURING THE
ENTIRE TIME OF THEIR ORDEAL.

2. THE SYRIANS ARE OBVIOUSLY EMBARRASSED ABOUT THE
WHOLE INCIDENT AND DEFENSE MINISTER TLAS VISITED
THE MEN SHORTLY AFTER THEY WERE BROUGHT
TO THE HOSPITAL. MEANWHILE, BOTH SYRIAN AND FOREIGN
NEWSPAPER MEN HAVE BEEN IN TO SEE THEM.

3. ALTHOUGH BOTH MEN ASSUME UN HEADQUARTERS WILL
INFORM THEIR RESPECTIVE PARENTS, IN RESPONSE TO MY
OFFER TO BE OF HELP, THEY BOTH WONDERED IF I MIGHT
ALSO PASS THE WORD THROUGH OUR CHANNELS.

4. FOR DEPARTMENT: WOULD DEPARTMENT PLEASE INFORM
FATHER OF CAPTAIN HOLLY, DR. JOSEPH E. HOLLY,
NORTHWOOD CIRCLE, CORNING, NEW YORK, THAT I VISITED
HIS SON AND THAT HE IS IN GOOD SPIRITS.

5. FOR DUBLIN: WOULD EMBASSY PLEASE INFORM MOTHER
OF CAPTAIN MORTELL, MRS. CONSTANCE MORTELL, MAIN
STREET, CHARLESVILLE, COUNTY CORK (SHE IS IN THE CORK
TELEPHONE DIRECTORY), THAT I VISITED HER SON AND
THAT HE, TOO, IS IN GOOD SPIRITS.

6. CAPTAIN HOLLY ALSO TOLD ME THAT THUS FAR DESPITE
THE SHELLING, THE SITUATION APPEARS TO BE
"CONTROLLED" BY BOTH SIDES WITH NEITHER SIDE APPARENTLY
WISHING IT TO GET OUT OF HAND. HE WAS NOT SURE
IN HIS OWN MIND THAT THEIR CAPTURE REPRESENTED ANY
CONCERTED SYRIAN EFFORT GIVEN THE FACT THAT THERE
WAS ONLY ONE MAN INVOLVED. HE OPINED THAT THE
YOUNG SAUDI MAY HAVE BEEN TRYING TO DEMONSTRATE HIS
"BEDOUIN" PROWESS. HE ADDED THAT BASED ON HIS
EXPERIENCE IN VIETNAM, IF THE SYRIANS REALLY WISHED
TO CAUSE TROUBLE FOR THE ISRAELIS, THE TERRAIN WAS
IDEAL FOR INFILTRATION AND SABOTAGE EFFORTS.
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7. THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR TELLS ME THAT HE HAS
HEARD FROM A RELIABLE SOURCE THAT THE SYRIANS
CLAIM THAT "RECENTLY" ONE OF THEIR COMMANDO TEAMS
SURPRISED A SMALL ISRAELI FORCE ON THE ISRAELI
SIDE OF THE LINES AND PRACTICALLY "WIPED IT OUT."
HE THOUGHT THAT INCIDENT (IF TRUE) AS WELL AS
THIS SAUDI EFFORT MAY NOW REPRESENT A FURTHER

ESCALATION ON THE GOLAN INVOLVING COMMANDO RAIDS AS WELL AS
ARTILLERY EXCHANGES.

8. COMMENT: I HAD NOT HEARD OF THIS ALLEGED
SYRIAN RAID BEFORE. PERHAPS TEL AVIV HAS
MORE INFORMATION ON IT.
SCOTES

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